

SEXTING FOR THE RIGHT REASONS: A LONGITUDINAL MEDIATION STUDY

Exploring **if** the **motivation** that drives **sexting** explains the **difference** in its **positive** or **negative** outcomes.

Sexting for the Right Reasons: A Longitudinal Mediation Study

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Scroll to see what
we found!



WHAT IS SEXTING?

We defined sexting as...

“...the sending and/or correspondence of an explicit or implied sexual content carried out through text, images, videos, or emoticons over smartphones or other digital devices” (Meier et al., 2025).



Research has shown that sexting **may result** in both **positive and negative outcomes** (Benotsch et al., 2013; Gassó et al., 2019; Mori et al., 2019; Hertlein et al., 2015; Reed et al., 2020). **Several studies** have also highlighted different sexting motivations (Bianchi et al., 2017, 2021; Drouin et al., 2013; Drouin et al., 2015; Reed et al., 2020; Van Ouytsel et al., 2017).

HOWEVER



...no research has explored whether sexting motivations could explain the link between sexting behaviors and outcomes in a longitudinal design and whether this differs by gender (Meier et al., 2025).

SEXTING MOTIVATIONS...

Autonomous motivations: Sexting for self-determined reasons:

- Identified motivation (the recognition of a behaviour as personally meaningful even if it does not align with your own beliefs and values)
- Integrated motivation (the behaviour is consistent to a person's values, goals, and needs)
- Intrinsic motivation (doing the behaviour for inherent satisfaction, interest, and enjoyment it brings)

Controlled motivations: Sexting driven by lower self-determination:

- External motivation (the behaviour is driven entirely by rewards and punishments external to yourself)
- Introjected motivation (doing the behaviour to avoid negative feelings like guilt and shame.)

OUTCOMES OF SEXTING...

Positive outcomes of sexting: Arousal, excitement, sexual intimacy, self-esteem, and sexual and relationship satisfaction.

Negative outcomes of sexting: Gossip, cyberbullying, cyber dating abuse, coerced sex, intimate partner violence, and mental health problems, like harmful substance use, anxiety, and depression.



WE WANTED TO KNOW:

Whether the motivations underlying sexting might help explain the divergence in its positive or negative outcomes and whether this differs by gender.

H1: The number of sent sexts will be associated with various positive and negative outcomes.

H2: More controlled motivations for sexting will be associated with more negative outcomes

H3: More autonomous motivations for sexting will be associated with more positive outcomes.



Continued....

WE WANTED TO KNOW:

Whether the motivations underlying sexting might help explain the divergence in its positive or negative outcomes and whether this differs by gender.

H4: Greater controlled motivations will mediate the association between number of sent sexts and more negative outcomes.

H5: Greater autonomous motivations will mediate the association between number of sent sexts and more positive outcomes.



...**H6:** These associations will be more pronounced among women than men.

N = 405

We recruited 405 adults aged 18-29 years, who had engaged in sexting within the past three months and were in either a casual or common relationship.



Participants completed online surveys twice within a six-week interval. They were instructed to choose a partner (i.e., their primary partner or one of their partners in polyamorous relationships) to consider while responding to the survey questions. Participants were measured on their sexting behaviours, sexting motivations, and sexting outcomes.

WE FOUND THAT...

More controlled motivations for sexting were associated with **more negative outcomes.**



More autonomous motivations for sexting were associated with an **increased** range of **positive outcomes.**



WE ALSO FOUND THAT...



Women were **less likely to experience negative outcomes** of sexting and supported less controlled motivations than men. Also, controlled motivations were linked to positive outcomes **only among women**.

Whereas, **men** experienced **more positive outcomes** and supported **more autonomous motivations**.

HOWEVER...

It is also important to note that participants **simultaneously** reported both positive and negative outcomes of sexting.

SO, WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN?



Our findings contribute to research by increasing awareness of sexting motivations, which may help individuals maximize the benefits and minimize the negative effects of sexting.

THIS IS A SUMMARY OF OUR PUBLISHED ARTICLE:

Meier, S., Marin-Dragu, S., McArthur, J. L., Cormier, M., Kelso, A., Dolek, S., Blais, J., Chorney, J., Rosen, N. O., & Stewart, S. H. (2025). Sexting for the Right Reasons: A Longitudinal Mediation Study. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 54(5), 1895–1905. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-025-03153-y>



**Blog post and infographic by
Sarah Gallant!**